



MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES
Maryland's Social Services Agency



MEDIA RELEASE

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**DHR USHERS IN NATIONAL ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH BY
APPLAUDING FAMILIES FROM THE BALTIMORE METRO AREA**

Baltimore City and Baltimore County applaud six families for their efforts

BALTIMORE – The Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR) got a head start on celebrating National Adoption Awareness month by honoring five families from Baltimore City and a family from Baltimore County that contributed the **770 total adoptions** finalized during fiscal year 2009.

“We have much to celebrate,” said DHR Secretary Brenda Donald. We have seen a 15 percent reduction in the overall number of children in foster care; a 43 percent decline in group home placements; we have recruited 1,500 new foster parents since 2007; and we found families for 770 children during our last fiscal year.”

The successes Donald highlighted were driven by the Department’s **Place Matters** initiative. This initiative builds on the premise that nothing matters more to a child than a place to call home.

Each of the local departments of social services honored families from their jurisdiction that adopted during the last year. These families were recognized for their commitment to adoption, their support of the agency’s goals, and their efforts to produce the best possible outcomes for children.

The **Baltimore City Department of Social Services** recognized **five** families for their efforts. They include:

Donald and Arnissa Ames: Arnissa Ames followed in her own mother’s foot steps. Her mother was also a foster parent. Donald and Arnissa originally expressed interest in having a young male foster child. However, when the Baltimore City Department of Social Services contacted them requesting that they provide care to an infant girl -- without hesitation -- they told the caseworker to “bring her to our home.” The Ames family adopted the little girl in February of 2009. They say that they “can’t imagine our lives without her!”

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Brandi Beckner: Ms. Beckner first fostered and then adopted two brothers – Jack and John. She is now even more committed to maintaining the sibling bond of children who cannot return to their biological families and is currently in pre-placement process to adopt the boy's infant sister. Brandi is forever grateful for having had the opportunity to adopt the children. She recently said: "no matter what I had to go through to adopt them, it was worth it. My children are the best thing that ever happened to me!"

Avan Howard: Mr. Howard bonded with Montrell -- a little boy that his mother was fostering. At first, Avan assisted as a back-up caregiver for Montrell. But when BCDSS decided to pursue another adoptive resource for Montrell, Avan stepped up to the plate and declared his own intent to adopt. He completed the application process and was approved as the adoptive resource for Montrell, and on National Adoption Day in November of 2008, Avan became Montrell's proud father.

Mark and Judy Schlothauer: At nine-months old, little Paige had already been subjected to more trauma than seen by the average adult. Her biological father made the unselfish decision to request assistance to ensure her safety. BCDSS placed her in foster care with the Schlothausers. According to Mrs. Schlothauer, "it was love at first sight when the social worker placed her in my arms. When we were asked to adopt her there was no hesitation as I knew she deserved the best life possible."

Jim and Julia Forest: Mr. and Mrs. Forest are both school teachers who believe in children. They are loving and determined adoptive parents. Initially, they wanted to adopt a male child but they decided to adopt a little girl named Emily who needed a home. Emily was placed in their home and transformed into a very loving, expressive, happy child. Previously, she struggled to express her emotions. The Forests use positive reinforcement to help Emily manage her behavior. They keep her actively engaged in extracurricular activities. The Forests are also currently seeking to adopt a young boy to make their family even more complete.

The Baltimore County Department of Social Services recognized:

Jason and Donna Neidinger: Most people would be exhausted by the demands and challenges presented by the children in the Neidinger family, but Donna and Jason always manage to find the energy needed to do what needs to be done. In 2000, the Neidingers were licensed as foster parents. Over the next several years, a variety of children were placed with them for varying lengths of time. Ultimately, they wound up adopting three children - each of whom have very complex needs. They are also raising three biological children.

The celebration was held at the Baltimore Zoo's Mansion House. In addition to an awards luncheon for their contributions, the families were also treated to an afternoon at the zoo with their children. "This is our 13th year of celebrating adoptions with an awards luncheon, but our families will tell you the biggest reward for them was being able to add these wonderful children to their families," Donald stated.

Additional information about this year's honorees can be found by visiting the DHR newsroom at www.dhr.state.md.us and clicking on the "Newsroom" tab on the left side of the page.

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- Martin O'Malley, Governor
- Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor
- Brenda Donald, Secretary

The 2009 Families of the Year from jurisdictions across the state include:

Allegany County	Eugene and Jeanne Miller
Anne Arundel County	Mark and Lisa Walinski
Baltimore City	Donald and Arnissa Ames Brandi Beckner Jim and Julia Forest Avan Howard Mark and Judy Schlothauer
Baltimore County	Jason and Donna Neidinger
Calvert County	Jerry and Mary Lee
Caroline County	Ron and Vicky Marquess
Carroll County	Marshall and Chrissie Thompson
Cecil County	Rick and Marianne Shull
Charles County	Lionel and Shelia Carroll
Dorchester County	Joseph and Glenda Smith
Frederick County	Douglas and Maureen Garlock
Garrett County	Danny and Barbara Baker
Harford County	Robert and Yvonne Cossey
Howard County	Deirdre Henderson
Montgomery County	Charlie and Jenni Weller
Prince George's County	Darla Sligh
Queen Anne's County	Mark and Darla Verdonck
St. Mary's County	Gary and Vickie Ferko
Somerset County	Jonathan and Cherry Conley
Talbot County	Deborah Fletcher
Washington County	Tom and Toni Barnhart
Wicomico County	Scott and Amy Ness
Worcester County	Augustine Cook

The Maryland Department of Human Resources is the state's social service provider. The agency collaborates with 24 local jurisdictions to: provide foster care, adoption and protective services to children; collect and distribute child support payments; and provide temporary cash, food stamps and medical assistance to families. It also funds programs for homeless persons, refugees, migrant workers, victims of crime and women who are displaced, battered or assaulted. Last year, DHR served 638,000 people in need. In terms of its annual budget, DHR is Maryland's fourth largest state agency.

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